Report of the Southwest Pilot Evaluation Team

January 14, 2002

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NOVA SCOTIA
Department of Education

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January 14, 2002

Honourable Jane Purves
Minister of Education
Department of Education
P.O. Box 578
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 2S9

Dear Minister:

We are pleased to submit the *Report of the Southwest Pilot Evaluation Team*.

This area of Nova Scotia has experienced a good deal of structural change in recent years. We believe the present structure as set out in legislation can work with some amendment, and with a systems approach to other changes needed to support it. Our recommendations are intended to be durable, and to give stability over the long term, which we believe the boards need given other challenges they will face in the coming years.

Although this evaluation was not required to be done until early 2004, we are each of the view that it is very timely to have called for an evaluation now. Having this report in hand will allow the existing elected school board members a two year period to work together on changes before the next school board elections.

As we moved through the process, we met many dedicated, caring and sincere people who are committed to quality education for their students. We saw innovative responses to educational needs, and other very positive signs. Elected board members and staff of this region work very hard in the service of students and for the betterment of education. We also appreciated the involvement of the staff members who helped us throughout the review. Their support, expertise and assistance was valuable to the team and its work.

In closing, we are very pleased to have had the opportunity to participate in this review. We enclose our report, and look forward to the meeting with your Deputy Minister, Dennis Cochrane, which has been scheduled for tomorrow at 2:00 p.m., to present and discuss our recommendations.

Yours very truly,

J. Colin Dodds
Chair

Len MacDonald
Member

Pamela Campbell
Member

Enclosure

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

In April 2000, an amendment to the *Education Act* created a pilot district school board structure in the region of the Southwest Regional School Board, whereby responsibility for delivery of educational programs and services became the responsibility of two district school boards, and support services became the responsibility of an administrative body. This was in response to the "Report of the Task Force on the Review of School Board Boundaries" of February 2000.

An evaluation of this pilot is required by legislation prior to October 2004. The Department of Education initiated an evaluation after the model was in operation for one full school year. The goal was to determine the effectiveness of the pilot in serving the needs of students and the educational community. The evaluation was carried out by a three-person Review Team.

The Review Team held 20 meetings with both district school boards, senior staff, special organizations and the public. Nova Scotians were invited to submit their opinions to the team, via mail-in guides, e-mail, faxes and telephone.

HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 59 written submissions were received. Approximately 70 people attended the four public meetings, with 18 individuals making presentations to the team in those meetings.

It was evident to the review team in listening to public presentations, meetings with school boards and education partners, and in reviewing the written submissions, that all those involved in the education system in the region are striving to meet their responsibilities under the *Education Act* to manage their system and the areas within their respective jurisdictions in a manner that will meet the needs of each and every students. From the start, the parties acknowledged that the pilot structure was a new one for Nova Scotia, and that time would be needed to identify and develop optimal methods of operation. With one full school year in operation under this structure, the review team believes that it is timely to conduct an evaluation now. This report can better support the parties as they work to continue to improve educational outcomes for students in the region.

As was the case with the "Report of the Task Force on the Review of School Board Boundaries", a range of issues were identified, which should be addressed. While the review team was asked to focus on the Southwest Pilot, some recommendations, where issues are similar to those identified in 2000, may be of some interest to other school boards. Other recommendations, of course, are specific to the region which was the subject of the evaluation.

The team felt it was important that its recommendations directly address the issues identified. To enable the system to be stable, well organized and managed in the future, the team's recommendations should be durable, and focussed on the system's pre-eminent responsibility, which is the provision of, and support to, educational programs and services, both now and in the future. The timing of the evaluation report gives elected boards and staff two years to work on making the recommended changes together, prior to school board elections in 2004.

Some highlights of recommendations, in brief:

The legislation, with some recommended amendments, provides an appropriate framework within which effective service to students and the educational community can occur. District school boards feel they have been able to more clearly focus on educational programs and services with the pilot, as compared to the former structure.

To further improve this focus, recommendations include strengthened linkages between the two district school boards and the central support body, and between school advisory councils and their district boards; an expansion of the monitoring and evaluation role; development of a strategic plan; and documentation of educational outcomes standards to guide school improvement and other planning.

Other recommendations include clarifying responsibility for human resource management, and transferring responsibility for employing school secretaries, as well as technology staff, to district school boards.

Administrative services (transportation, facilities, finance and human resources) are seen as part of the overall educational experience, and a more holistic approach is recommended. Concerns were expressed that these services should be improved for students, and one key factor in these expressions of concern is a widespread sense of uncertainty surrounding roles, responsibilities, and how to access services when needed. Recommendations to address these uncertainties include an organization structure with links to promote collaborative policy development, analysis or assessment of services now being delivered, internal and external communications, and professional development. The object of each recommendation is to enhance the focus on support of services to students.

Concerns about governance, appropriate governance roles, and the linkage to administration were expressed and, once again, this is largely characterized by uncertainty surrounding roles and responsibilities. Recommendations to address this include development of governance capacity through workshops, research, professional development, and general guidance to boards and school advisory councils.

In closing, the Review Team commends the board members, staff and parents of the area for their commitment to education, and expresses the hope that these recommendations will be helpful to their continued efforts. Full recommendations appear starting on page 19 of this Report.

INTRODUCTION

In April 2000, an amendment to the *Education Act* created a pilot district school board structure in the region of the Southwest Regional School Board, whereby responsibility for the provision of P-12 education was split into two district school boards, with support services provided by an administrative body. The amendment included a requirement that an evaluation be conducted of the pilot prior to the next municipal and school board elections in October 2004. As this model has now been in place for just over one full school year, the Department of Education initiated an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the pilot in serving the needs of students and the educational community in this area.

The goal of this review was to evaluate and report on the operations of the three school boards (two district, one regional) as established under Sections 10A-10K of the *Education Act,* to determine what works well, what does not work well; to compare the model to the previous model where appropriate and to make recommendations for future directions. Draft Terms of Reference for the evaluation were developed by a committee of stakeholder and departmental representatives, and approved by the Minister of Education. The Terms of Reference can be found in Appendix A.

The Minister appointed a three person team to conduct the evaluation. The evaluation team membership can be found in Appendix B. The Terms of Reference require that the team deliver a report, by January 15, 2002 to the Minister of Education, which provides a concise assessment addressing the key questions, with recommendations for future action, including a summary of the consultation process, and noting differences in perspectives between the two district school boards as well as the Southwest Regional School Board.

This report includes the results of this evaluation, with background and recommendations as required by the Terms of Reference.

HISTORY

In its 1992 report, the All Parties Select Committee on Education made a number of recommendations for change in the public education system. Among the recommended changes were the creation of more effective schools with broader, more meaningful local involvement, input and participation, and greater accountability to those the system serves. Between 1992 and 1995, a number of comprehensive system and public consultations occurred to assist with development of a restructured system, and in 1995-96, a new *Education Act* was introduced and proclaimed into law.

The new Act established one provincial Francophone and six regional Anglophone school boards; redefined roles and responsibilities of all partners and school community members with a focus on ensuring access to, and delivery of, the educational program; introduced School Advisory Councils as part of the governance structure; and clarified accountability expectations. The ultimate goal was to create the best possible climate to support student success.

The amalgamation of school boards was completed in August 1996. Three years later, in 1999, the Minister of Education appointed a five-person Task Force to review school board boundaries to ensure they permitted effective operation, and to recommend any necessary changes. The Task Force's report of February 2000 raised specific concerns with respect to the Southwest Regional School Board, in the area of access to board members, their extensive travel requirements due to the large geography of this board, and in the lack of cohesiveness of the board itself. It stated that "the present elected board (in the Southwest) should be taking a broader regional perspective in the decision-making" and focus more on education of students. It recommended eliminating the elected school board in this region and replacing it with a pilot model of site based (ie: school-based) management. As an alternative, the department implemented the pilot structure which is the topic of this evaluation.

In implementing the pilot, all parties acknowledged the fact that this was a new structure for Nova Scotia, without precedents that could provide ready guidance, and that time and effort would be needed to identify how it might best work. An evaluation after one year was considered to be appropriate, in order to assist staff and board members to assess their practices as a foundation for making further improvement.

STRUCTURE OF THE SOUTHWEST PILOT

The Southwest Regional School Board became an administrative entity, with an appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who reports directly to the Department of Education. The CEO's duties are mainly operational, including providing support to the district school boards; managing all matters pertaining to financial management, student conveyance management; facilities management excluding school closures; and human resource management. In addition, the CEO is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of educational results, and for working with the district boards to assure quality in the education system.

The educational component of the Southwest region is separated into two district school boards. The South Shore District comprises Lunenburg and Queens counties and part of Annapolis county, and the Tri-County District includes Shelburne, Yarmouth, and Digby counties. Existing elected school board members are assigned to the district school board based on the geographic area each represents. These district school boards are responsible to employ the Director of Education, teachers, teacher assistants and library staff; administer the public school program in each district including provision of education, instruction and services for students enrolled in its schools; develop policy respecting the delivery of education programs and services; assure the quality of education with the Southwest CEO; interact with school advisory councils; identify staff development; and determine school closings.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

A number of means were used to obtain input for the review. Twenty meetings, including four public meetings in the two districts, were held in the region and in Halifax between December 4 and 11, 2001. They are listed in Appendix C of this Report. A brief summary of what was heard at these meetings can be found in Appendix D.

There was a relatively low turnout at some public meetings, and few submissions were received. The team believes this is because of the low level of understanding of the pilot structure, and also the absence of a sense of crisis, which tends to lessen the degree of public input.

In addition to meetings, other means of obtaining input included a *Guide for Public Input* which was available on-line, at Access Nova Scotia sites and school board offices in the region. Information about the process and meeting schedule, and a means to file electronic submissions was available on the department's Website. Responses were also received by e-mail and fax. All of the information received was reviewed by the evaluation team, in the context of the Terms of Reference, which directed that consideration be given to six specific themes. Those themes are governance, educational programs and services, finance, operational services, communications and accountability. The team's overall observations with respect to each of these themes formed the background for the recommendations, and they can be found in Appendix E.

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS ASKED BY TERMS OF REFERENCE

In this section, brief responses are provided by the Evaluation Team to each of the fifteen questions posed in the Terms of Reference. Additional detail is shown in Appendix E as noted above.

Governance Questions

Are the roles and responsibilities as defined in the *Education Act* supported by the Southwest pilot structure?

Yes, with two exceptions. Monitoring and evaluation of educational outcomes is a crucial role but is not clearly supported in the Act. Second, responsibility for school closures rests with the district boards, while any saving or benefit of closure accrues to the administrative body. There is a need to identify alternatives so that responsibilities and savings are shared.

Does the legislation provide for clear division of responsibility between the district boards and the regional administration?
The legislation does provide for clear division of general responsibilities. In practice, however, the division has in many respects not occurred. Support mechanisms that could help make this happen include a strategic planning framework, funding for transition, professional development, and guidelines for both performance expectations and educational outcomes.

Has the Southwest pilot structure enabled board members to focus on the quality and delivery of education programs?
Board members perceived an improved ability to focus on educational programs. There is a need to define specific educational outcomes as a foundation for an effective focus, to qualify and quantify improvements, which cannot be accomplished by the structure alone.

Has the Southwest pilot structure improved the accessibility of board members?
Perhaps to some extent; board members felt they are more accessible, while the public expressed less satisfaction with accessibility.

Has the Southwest pilot structure facilitated positive relationships among board members?
Within each district board structure, board members expressed improvements in relationships amongst themselves.

Educational Programs and Services Questions

How well has the Southwest pilot structure been able to utilize existing resources to serve the students and the community in the Southwest, enhance access to programs and services to meet student needs, facilitate the provision of and access to specialized support for students, and facilitate the provision of and access to professional development opportunities for staff?

One year is a relatively short time frame in which to assess some of these areas. Each board cited areas where they felt they had been able to enhance access to services or specialized support for students. With respect to professional development for staff, some perception exists that this has actually declined, although this may have been due in part to the focus on structure which has occupied the boards in the past year.

Has the Southwest pilot structure resulted in changes in partnerships with other agencies?
Once again it is quite early to reach conclusions; however, both school boards described innovative partnerships, and that should be encouraged.

Finance Questions

Are the financial structures effective in utilizing existing resources to facilitate the embodiment of the principles of: equity, adequacy, accountability and responsiveness?
The Southwest Regional School Board has accountability for and control over funds allocated to the region. The district schools boards, which are funded on the basis of enrolment, are responsible for the delivery of education programs with their mostly fixed costs. The district boards have little financial flexibility and little incentive to save money or share resources. Though we are not saying they are wasteful, incentives are needed to encourage the district boards and the Southwest Regional School Board to save money and share resources, and guidelines are needed to demonstrate how any savings should be allocated. A process is needed to address education needs that may not be enrolment-driven.

Operational Services Questions

Does the structure enable effective provision and management of transportation, human resources and maintenance operations?
As envisioned, the legislation provides a framework to enable this to occur in the transportation and maintenance areas. In practice, however, these services continue to be delivered much as before. Service delivery needs re-evaluation, including an assessment of needs, analysis of work now being performed, and consideration of changes to process management techniques that might be helpful.

In the area of human resource management, the structure is unclear and responsibilities are blurred, particularly in the areas of policy, authority and accountability. This function needs to be defined and assessed, to determine its optimal function in support of both the educational and administrative services entities.

Are stakeholders satisfied with the responsiveness of Southwest staff in areas no longer the responsibility of elected members, for example, transportation?
In short stakeholders are not satisfied, and are particularly dissatisfied with transportation, although concerns were expressed in all areas of operational services.

Does the structure enable the effective management of changes in enrolment and achieve economies of scale?
This region will experience a significant decline in enrolment over the coming few years, and significant changes will be needed within the current structure to enable the boards to achieve economies of scale and continue providing educational services and programs.

Communications Questions

Does the Southwest pilot structure facilitate effective communications among all educational partners at all levels?
No, the structure of three separate bodies does not make communications easier. Parental access to staff, for example, remains a concern, despite communication tools like toll-free lines. The pilot structure does not facilitate greater involvement of stakeholders or staff groups in policy or issues resolution, however, these concerns can be resolved within the structure by other means.

Accountability Questions

Does the Southwest pilot structure provide for the same, improved or diminished accountability for the delivery of the educational program to students?
The structure allows for improved accountability at the district board level for educational programs and services. The separation of responsibility for support services has resulted in a perception by district school boards of having less financial flexibility to deal with some priority educational areas, for example. Another key accountability is the role of measurement, monitoring and reporting of educational outcomes, and elements of monitoring are occurring, and these need to also be considered in the broader context of how the system is working, and where improvements are required.

Does the Southwest pilot structure provide for the same, improved or diminished accountability, effectiveness and communications with the government?
The structure provides a framework for accountability, effectiveness and communications with government. The Department did undertake to meet with both boards on a fairly regular basis, particularly in the early months of the transition. Other monitoring and communications mechanisms in use with the prior structure have continued.

Are there clear accountability and reporting structures for the employees of the three boards?
While there is a reasonable accountability framework in legislation, the reporting structures in place do not establish clear lines. Many staff members express uncertainty as to what is expected of them under the pilot structure.

In Conclusion

Before closing this section, the team wishes to comment on the level of caring, sincerity, dedication and concern demonstrated by the board members, staff and parents who we encountered during the review process. All showed a commitment to make things work, despite

the dysfunctional history of the former structure, and the transitional difficulties which are the nature of a pilot. Innovative responses to educational needs are evident, and we were pleased to see the importance attached to the School Advisory Councils. To the extent that uncertainties exist, students' interests have been nonetheless protected throughout this time.

CONTEXT OF DELIBERATIONS

The team approached its task in the context of certain factors that are realities for Southwestern Nova Scotia. This context is set out in this section.

Globally, we are in a time of extremely rapid social and economic change, such as the world has never before experienced. The keys to success in the emerging knowledge-based economy are changing and education systems throughout the world are being called upon to adapt, and to prepare students for an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing future.

The Nova Scotian economy is in the midst of a major restructuring as it adapts to the global context. As well, as a province, it has experienced a decline in population over the past 30 years and this trend is projected to continue with significant downward trends in rural areas. Every school board in Nova Scotia needs to develop a plan for how it will cope with this trend. Excess square footage, administrative and transportation costs are major concerns that must be addressed if school boards are to continue delivering an optimal range of educational opportunities that students need to prepare for their future in the new economy and society.

In southwestern Nova Scotia, particular challenges exist including its historically resource based economy, a rural population and large geographic areas which are sparsely populated. Its enrolment decline is among the steepest in Nova Scotia. This area is also home to some rich and diverse cultural communities, who are justifiably proud of their traditions and who are working hard to preserve their cultures and enrich their communities and their schools.

Having said all this, declining enrolment and the need to achieve economies of scale was the basis for the 1996 amalgamation. Indeed, the population decline in the school system in the Southwest area is 4.4% since 1996-97, compared to the provincial average of 3.6%, and projections to 2005 are for a 10.1% decline in the Southwest, compared to 7% for the province. Additional detail is attached as Appendix F. These pressures unfortunately have not, nor will they, reverse themselves in the foreseeable future. These factors present particular challenges to the school system in this area, in how to prepare for the future while still being able to provide the learning environment, range of educational opportunities including co-curricular and extra-curricular and support services, which is the core mandate of school boards. It is this context, that received careful consideration as the team developed its recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preamble

It is important that changes recommended address the issues identified, and be durable and long lasting. The primary goal should be to have a system which is well organized and managed, which can focus its work toward its pre-eminent responsibility, which is the provision of educational programs and services. The framework of the legislation, itself, does permit the establishment of a well-functioning organization, with some revisions which are reflected in the recommendations.

During the pilot, school boards feel they have been able to spend more time focussing on education, which is a positive development that should be continued. The ability of the boards to deliver the educational programs and services in the long term is of paramount importance, as is the need to focus on students in all aspects of the system. As well, the education system in this area has experienced a great deal of structural change in recent years, and the team concluded the recommendations should ensure a degree of stability as well as durability as noted above. It is important that recommendations for further change not create more disruption than necessary.

While there is little or no desire to return to the former model of the Southwest Regional School Board, there has been considerable uncertainty during the pilot concerning roles and responsibilities. Those uncertainties were, however, offset by the force of personalities working within the system who were determined to protect students' interests, most often by way of tremendous personal sacrifices of time and effort. It is hoped that these recommendations will address and resolve the uncertainties that were found.

Many presenters questioned the wisdom of performing this evaluation now, in 2001-02, rather than in 2004 as outlined in the Act. The team's view is that 2001-02 is an opportune time to do the evaluation, as it provides an opportunity within the mandate of the present school board members to develop a long range plan, including comprehensive educational outcomes measurement, monitoring and evaluation, that will ensure viability and good governance of education in Southwestern Nova Scotia, over the long term.

After much consideration, the team makes the following recommendations, on the basis that they encourage the focus on education and students, support the development of well-functioning and effective organizations, and help preserve and strengthen the ability of the democratically elected school boards to provide the best possible education program now and in the future.

Structure

1. ***Retain the present structure***, as outlined in the *Education Act*, with modifications to the *Act* as set out in Appendix G, and as set out in the proposed organization chart in Appendix H. This will clarify reporting relationships, establish communications links

and resolve the placement of school secretaries, technology support staff who serve schools, and certain education functions, to clarify that the district school boards are responsible for the delivery of all P-12 educational programs and services. This will also enable the parties to collaborate and share common solutions, where appropriate, and to achieve economies of scale necessary to ensure the region's long-term ability to fulfil its core educational mandate.

2. ***Establish a four-member Advisory Committee***, consisting of the Chair and one other member of each district school board to be selected by each board. A board member would chair the committee, and the position of chair would rotate between the two district school boards regularly. The committee would work with the CEO and advise on standards for educational outcomes and educational services, educational priorities as identified through school improvement plans and outcomes monitoring processes, funding allocations as related to educational matters, and other issues of common interest.

   We recommend that the Advisory Committee and CEO meet at least ten times annually, and board members report back to their boards at least quarterly. The intent is to strengthen each district board's focus on quality and delivery of education programs and services, to ensure equitable resource allocation, enable all board members to be aware of relevant issues across the region, and to improve guidance to staff on priorities and issues of concern.

3. ***Change titles to more clearly demonstrate education as the primary focus and purpose of the organization, and establish a stable recruitment process.*** The title of the Chief Executive Officer position becomes Chief Educational Officer (CEO), and the title of the administrative entity changes from the Southwest Regional School Board to the Southwest Education Authority. Revise the appointment process for the CEO to provide for a five year term (renewable) after 2004, with a competition process to include input from the board Advisory Committee, and recommendation to the Minister. Retain the titles of District School Boards, and Director of Education title, and provide for a five year term (renewable) after 2004 for the Director of Education.

4. ***Establish a direct consultative link between School Advisory Councils and each school board, and link school improvement plans with each board's long-range strategic plan and educational outcomes framework***. School Advisory Councils are a very important component of the governance structure, and a clear role, accompanied by a statement of departmental expectations of how boards and councils would work together toward educational improvements, is needed. Clear linkages are needed between school advisory councils, staff, boards and the department in terms of ensuring school improvement plans support long term plans for educational outcomes improvements.

   We recommend the Authority also oversee a School Improvement Initiatives Fund to support initiatives that achieve educational priorities, in consultation with Directors of Education and the board advisory committee.

5. ***Establish a link with parents and students***, on the organization chart and in policies, protocols and communications procedures, in order to more clearly demonstrate the importance of these critical stakeholders to the purpose of the education system.

6. ***Clarify how roles and responsibilities as defined by the Act can best be put into practice***, to enable fulfilment of the core educational mandate. Rewrite policies, protocols, reporting relationships and job descriptions to reflect a clear focus on students in both educational and support functions, and to clearly define roles, responsibilities and outcomes.

7. ***Develop formal internal communications, consultation and involvement methods*** (for example, regular meetings) both within district boards and the authority, and also between them, to augment the informal communications and individual efforts that have held the organization together to date, and to build an effective, informed, involved and accountable team.

8. ***Develop and execute a new communications plan for stakeholders and the public*** to ensure there is a comprehensive understanding of the structure, roles and responsibilities of all those in the education system, as a clear recognition of the need for improvement in communications with parents, stakeholders and the public. There are some current examples of initiatives in this regard.

9. ***Move toward the consolidation of the physical sites to a single location from which administrative services are provided to district school boards.*** Support staff should focus on service improvement by building awareness of services that can be expected, ascertaining and responding to client needs, and ensuring that people across the region are satisfied that they receive equitable service regardless of location.

Focus on Education

One key deliverable of the pilot structure was improvement in the ability to focus on educational programs and services, but it has not been possible to objectively assess progress in this area. Formal monitoring of educational outcomes does not occur, but which is critical if boards are to focus their resources and efforts in the right areas. Therefore:

10. ***Expand the current monitoring and evaluation role***, under the direction of the Chief Educational Officer and in collaboration with Directors of Education and Directors of the Southwest Education Authority. They can then move toward co-ordination of monitoring activities needed to effectively and appropriately gauge student success in achieving the educational outcomes and standards established by the Department of Education. This initiative is central to a multi-year planning process, as recommended below.

11. ***Establish, document and execute a formal framework of educational outcomes***, using the Public School Program as the starting point, to be overseen by the Southwest Education Authority, in consultation with Directors of Education. It is noted that

educational standards, outcomes and mechanisms to measure progress and quality will require direction from the Province.

12. ***Establish a long-term strategic plan*** as a guide for school improvement plans, educational outcomes priorities identified through monitoring and evaluation, annual business plans, and staff and board member professional development/educational plans. Multi-year plans will be evaluated, modified and extended each school year, to ensure there is an ongoing focus on priorities to improve educational outcomes, which represent good value for money and effort expended. This will enable improved reporting of results, resource allocation based on priorities, and will support the identification of issue areas that are not addressed by funding allocated by enrolment, and to ensure funding allocation is needs-improvement driven.

13. ***Involve stakeholders (staff, teachers, principals, school advisory council members) in policy development in areas that affect them***, particularly where administrative and educational issues overlap. In general, but particularly where there are shared interests, both perspectives are required to identify an effective solution.

14. ***Share the successful and innovative partnerships which have helped to improve student success*** between district boards, and elsewhere in Nova Scotia, as an opportunity to tap into expertise, adopt best practices and inspire additional partnerships.

Operational Services

Transportation, administrative services and facilities were all areas of concern, and the transportation system is widely viewed as not working well in most respects. Particularly given declining enrolments, the transportation and facilities services need re-evaluation, and more transparency and access is required in the areas of finance and human resources as well. With respect to transportation, possibly even a province-wide solution will be required. In southwestern Nova Scotia alone, this is perhaps the most compelling argument against moving to two separate regional school boards, as it would become extremely difficult for them to achieve the necessary economies of scale while still being able to deliver educational programs and services. This was also the conclusion of the "Report of the Task Force on the Review of School Board Boundaries" in February 2000.

Transportation

14. ***Conduct a full audit of the transportation system*** as the basis for a plan, to be developed with input from parents, drivers and other staff, and district school boards. The plan will acknowledge the value of extra-curricular and co-curricular busing to students, and set out ways to address issues such as length of student time on buses, the policy regarding separation of P-12 students, the possibility of contract busing for remote locations, and will outline the move toward efficient routing, communications protocols for full access,

and reliable emergency responses. Staffing requirements should be rationalized as part of the plan.

15. ***Resolve the service difficulties being experienced as a result of the busing services provided by CSAP*** to some students in Tri-County, in the context of the foregoing transportation audit. One option may be to move to a single service provider, to ensure that all students do in fact have better access to school-based and co-curricular opportunities.

16. ***Develop, jointly with parents, bus drivers and school administrators, a policy and review process*** on the issue of student discipline on buses: how decisions are made and reviewed, and appeals mechanisms to be included. Staff of both district school boards and the authority to be involved in this process, given that transportation is the responsibility of the Authority, and education is the responsibility of district school boards.

Facilities

17. ***Complete an audit of facilities and physical plant***, to support a multi-year plan to address the issue of excess square footage as population continues to decline, including whether to renovate, replace or close facilities. A joint process, involving district boards and the Authority, is required to address school closures, and sharing of savings generated as a result. Priority should be placed on support of education. Possibly, transitional funding arrangements with district boards retaining partial funding for a year or two following closure could support plans for positive changes for parents and students. It is recognized that the Department has established the framework for school closures, and their direction will be required.

18. ***Conduct an audit of facilities services presently being delivered.*** This should include maintenance, cleaning, how priorities are set and staff are utilized, as well as to ascertain where funds are now being spent on facilities services. Thereafter, consideration should be given to developing dedicated budget lines to ensure facilities funding is being spent as intended.

Finances

19. ***Retain the Southwest area as a single financial entity and strengthen the involvement of district school boards*** in budgeting, resource allocation, specific needs financing, effective use of resources and sharing of savings realized. Financial information should be transparent, in that district boards receive full information, and are fully involved in financial decisions that affect them, both educational expenditures and educational support expenditures. This level of understanding is critical to support decisions in the long term to achieve economies of scale that will become essential as time goes on.

20. ***Provide user-friendly financial reports and professional development for board members and senior staff*** to ensure ability to make knowledgeable, informed choices. As the information now provided is in a format which can be difficult for non-financial personnel, a more easily digestible and user-friendly format is needed.

Human Resources Management

21. ***Conduct a needs assessment of human resource services required by district school boards and the authority, and identify staff needed to carry out those requirements.*** The pilot structure is unclear and responsibilities are blurred in this area, particularly so in the areas of policy, authority and accountability. Staffing, records management and some labour relations services are now being delivered; consideration should be given to advice and guidance to support teacher and staff evaluation, professional development including needs assessments, organization development, succession planning, and health, safety and wellness. These services can directly support school improvement initiatives, and outcomes of monitoring and evaluation of educational outcomes in schools.

General

22. ***Provide professional development to support the capacity for successful operation of these organizations and enable both senior staff and board members to meet their responsibilities.*** Specific topic areas recommended for professional development to be customized to the differing needs of the elected board members, and senior staff, include governance and roles and responsibilities within the governance model; team development; communications and meeting management; co-operative problem-solving; planning (strategic, school improvement, educational plans, etc.); monitoring and evaluation; systems audit and evaluation.

    The Department of Education should assist with identifying development needs, and play a coaching and monitoring role to support senior staff in their development of the skills needed to implement these recommendations.

23. ***Enhance the Department of Education's monitoring role in all areas*** from financial, to planning, policy, definition of educational outcomes, and the ability of elected board members to knowledgeably perform their required functions. As well, it should revisit its accountability and service structures as they relate to the expectations of the district school boards, to better support the planning and introduction of changes recommended in this report, and also monitoring progress against stated plans.

24. ***The Department of Education, with the Nova Scotia School Boards Association, to identify and establish methods to develop governance capacity,*** including the appropriate involvement of NSSBA and others. Areas for consideration include the familiarization of board members on the education sector and issues facing school boards today, governance trends and issues, workshops with board members on governance

itself, engaging senior staff in building awareness of the governance role of board members and how to work with boards, development of a protocol for how School Advisory Councils can effectively link with boards, co-ordination of professional development for both board members and SACs on the issue of governance and co-operative relationships.

It is acknowledged that some recommendations will require legislative change, and a point-form list of changes identified by the team is attached as Appendix "G".

CONCLUSION

The review team wishes to express thanks to all those who took part in meetings or who made submissions for this evaluation. We were gratified with the thoughtfulness of those we met, and the seriousness with which staff, parents, representatives of organizations and members of the public responded to any and all questions we asked of them.

Once again, the team wishes to commend senior staff and board members for their caring, dedication and commitment in making the pilot project work, in the service of students and for the betterment of education.

While the recommendations will need work to implement, the team believes the results can enable board members, senior staff and all others to work together and with parents to ensure a well-functioning system for our students, teachers and support staff. They deserve no less.

Appendix A

Terms of Reference and Mandate

Background

In December 1999, a five-person Task Force was appointed by the Minister of Education to conduct a major consultation to review the school board boundaries. The goal of the review was to ensure that the boards were operating in an effective manner and to recommend any necessary changes to the board boundaries. The Task Force report was submitted to the Minister in February 2000 and raised specific concerns with respect to the Southwest Regional School Board. The Task Force felt that "the present elected board in the Southwest Region should be taking a broader regional perspective in the decision-making." The Task Force felt that the Board should focus more on the education of students. There was also concern about the accessibility of board members and their extensive travel requirements.

In response to the Task Force report, a pilot project was undertaken whereby the Southwest region is divided into two districts. The South Shore District is comprised of Lunenburg and Queens counties and part of Annapolis county, and the Tri-County District is made up of Shelburne, Yarmouth and Digby counties. An elected board administers the public schools in each district. Its responsibilities pertain primarily to education and include:[1]

- making provision for the education and instruction of all students enrolled in its schools and programs;
- employing teachers, teacher assistants, school librarians and school library clerks/technicians;
- employing and evaluating the Director of Education;
- ensuring that its schools adhere to the provincial program of studies;
- joint responsibility with the regional board to assure quality in the education system;
- policy development respecting the delivery of education programs and services;
- promoting excellence in schools;
- interaction with school advisory councils;
- identifying staff development needs; and
- school closings.

The Southwest Regional School Board remains as an administrative entity, with an appointed Chief Executive Officer, who reports directly to the Department of Education, whose duties are mainly operational, including:[1]

- providing support services to the district school boards;
- joint responsibility with the district school boards to assure quality in the education system;
- all matters of financial management;

[1]The reader is referred to the *Education Act* for a complete list of responsibilities.

- all matters of student-conveyance management;
- all matters of facilities management, except for school closings;
- all matter of human resource management; and
- employing secretarial staff.

Goals of the Evaluation

This model has been in place for one year and an evaluation is being undertaken to determine the effectiveness of this approach in serving the needs of students and the educational community in southwestern Nova Scotia. The goal is:

> To evaluate and report on the operations of the three school boards as established under Sections 10A-10K of the *Education Act*.[2]

This will be accomplished by:

> Evaluating the pilot model to determine what works well; what does not work well; to compare the model to the previous model, where appropriate; and to make recommendations for future directions.

These goals will be addressed within the following questions:

1. Governance

.1 Are the roles and responsibilities as defined in the *Education Act* supported by the Southwest pilot structure?

.2 Does the legislation provide for clear division of responsibility between the district boards and the regional administration?

.3 Has the Southwest pilot structure enabled board members to focus on the quality and delivery of education programs?

.4 Has the Southwest pilot structure improved the accessibility of board members?

.5 Has the Southwest pilot structure facilitated positive relationships among board members?

2. Education Programs and Services

.1 How well has the Southwest pilot structure been able to utilize existing resources to:

- serve the students and the community in the Southwest?

Note that Sections 10A-10K of the *Education Act* were enacted by Chapter 11 of the Acts of 2000 (Bill 47).

- enhance access to programs and services to meet student needs?
- facilitate the provision of and access to specialized support for students?
- facilitate the provision of and access to professional development opportunities for staff?

.2 Has the Southwest pilot structure resulted in changes in partnerships with other agencies?

3. Finance

.1 Are the financial structures effective in utilizing existing resources to facilitate the embodiment of the principles of: equity, adequacy, accountability and responsiveness?

4. Operational Services

.1 Does the structure enable effective provision and management of transportation, human resources and maintenance operations?

.2 Are stakeholders satisfied with the responsiveness of Southwest staff in areas no longer the responsibility of elected members, for example, transportation?

.3 Does the structure enable the effective management of changes in enrolment and achieve economies of scale?

5. Communications

.1 Does the Southwest pilot structure facilitate effective communications among all educational partners at all levels?

6. Accountability

.1 Does the Southwest pilot structure provide for the same, improved or diminished accountability for the delivery of the educational program to students?

.2 Does the Southwest pilot structure provide for the same, improved or diminished accountability, effectiveness and communications with the government?

.3 Are there clear accountability and reporting structures for the employees of the three boards?

Scope of Consultations

The evaluator(s) will hold public meetings in each of the districts and will consult with key stakeholders residing within the boundaries of the Southwest Regional School Board.

Deliverables

The evaluator(s) will deliver a report to the Minister of Education which provides a concise assessment addressing the key questions above and provides recommendations for future action. The report will provide a summary of the consultation process, and will note where differences in perspectives exist between the Tri-County District School Board and South Shore District School Board, as well as noting where views differ from the Southwest Regional School Board.

Process and Time Lines

An evaluator(s) will be hired in October to conduct an independent evaluation of the southwest pilot project. A final report will be submitted to the Minister of Education not later than mid January, 2002. Necessary logistical support will be provided by the Department of Education through the office of David White, Regional Education Officer.

Appendix B

The Evaluation Team

Members

Dr. Colin Dodds, Chair
President, Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

Pamela Campbell
Former teacher and administrator from New Brunswick

J. Leonard MacDonald
Education consultant and former teacher and superintendent from Nova Scotia

Department of Education Resource Staff

David White
Regional Education Officer
Public Schools Branch

Susan Crandall
Director
Education Renewal

Megan Edwards
Research and Statistical Officer
Policy and Planning Division, Corporate Policy

Appendix C

Meeting Schedule

Public Meetings	December 4 - Yarmouth (Glenwood) December 8 - Digby December 9 - Liverpool December 10 - Bridgewater
Meetings with Organizations	December 5 - Nova Scotia Teachers Union (Yarmouth/Shelburne locals) December 10 - Canadian Union of Public Employees - Local 964 December 10 - Nova Scotia Teachers Union (Lunenburg/Queens locals) December 10 - Nova Scotia Government Employees Union - Local 70/70A December 11 - Association of Nova Scotia Education Administrators December 11 - Nova Scotia School Boards Association and Canadian School Boards Association December 11 - Nova Scotia Federation of Home and School Associations December 11 - Nova Scotia Department of Education December 11 - Nova Scotia Teachers Union (provincial)
School Board and Officials Meetings	December 4 - Tri-County District School Board December 5 - Phil Landry, Tri-County Director of Education December 5 - Southwest Regional School Board: Leroy Legere, CEO; Jerome Tanner, Director of Finance and Operations; Richard Smith, Director of Corporate Services December 10 - South Shore District School Board December 10 - Steve Simpson, South Shore Director of Education December 10 - Ann Jones, former Superintendent of the Southwest Regional School Board December 11 - Don Glover, Coordinator of Monitoring and Evaluation, Southwest Regional School Board

Appendix D

What We Heard

The Team received 41 completed questionnaires (19 hard copy and 22 electronic), and about 18 submissions from the public and education stakeholder organizations. Written reports were also presented to the evaluation team by the two district boards and the regional board.

Public Meetings and Submissions

In addition to the 41 written submissions, approximately 70 people attended the four public meetings with about 18 individuals presenting to the evaluation team.

Tri-County District

Glenwood - Comments focussed on board governance in the pilot structure. It was noted that separation of responsibilities between the district and regional boards was working well and it was felt that this was partially due to the individuals in the CEO and Director of Education roles. These positions should continue to be filled by educators. Concerns with busing were expressed including the length of time children spend on the bus, and the lack of co- and extra-curricular busing services. There was no desire to return to the former board structure.

Digby - Only a small number of people attended this meeting. Comments focussed on the evaluation process and general governance issues.

South Shore District

Liverpool - This meeting was sparsely attended. Those who did attend saw this pilot as a positive step though it has caused some confusion regarding which board people should contact for certain issues (i.e., busing, maintenance). Busing was also noted as a concern.

Bridgewater - This meeting saw a larger attendance with a wide range of perspectives provided. Communications between the board (district and regional) and the public was noted as needing improvement. It was suggested that baseline funding was needed for operational services. Buildings are not being well maintained.

School Boards

The evaluation team met with each school board to hear their views on the school board pilot project. They also met with administrative staff from both the district boards and the regional board. The following outlines the key messages from these meetings.

Southwest Regional School Board

The Southwest Regional School Board was mandated to provide support to the district boards with service delivery, however, no defined protocols have been furnished and no formal structure of interaction between the district and regional boards was created.

In the budget there is no discretionary funding that would allow this central board to allocate funds for emerging issues so the district boards must work within the allocation they are given based on enrolment. This board stated that any savings in operations should be passed onto the district boards, however, this is not a legislated requirement. The Director of Finance and Operations meets with the Directors of Education in each district to determine allocation of funds. Again, this is not mandated in the Act.

There is a feeling that busing should be one service throughout this region. After the creation of the pilot, busing service was redesigned but not all the problems have been addressed.

Changes are needed to the pilot structure to clarify roles and responsibilities of the regional and district boards, and of the board employees.

Tri-County District School Board

The Tri-County District Board is satisfied with the changes to the school board structure, but feel the public doesn't understand the pilot and who to contact for concerns with operational issues. The board feels they work well together to achieve consensus on issues, and decisions are fully supported such as when they made changes to the special needs policy, and created a learning centre. There is also strong support for the position of Chief Executive Officer in the Southwest board to be filled by an educator who understands the global needs of the education system.

With regard to budgets, the board feels they have no flexibility within their allocation as there is no guarantee that operational savings will be transferred to the districts for education programs.

There are concerns with busing as some service is shared with the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). School calendars have been co-ordinated with CSAP, however, problems continue with coordinating co- and extra-curricular busing services as well as length of trips to and from school.

South Shore District School Board

The South Shore District School Board also indicates general satisfaction with the pilot and would not like to return to the former Regional structure. They did, however, note some modifications that they feel would be better assigned to the district boards such as responsibility for summer school, adult high school (up to age 21), international students and the Co-Ordinator of Race Relations, Cross-Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH). They also suggest that district boards be charged with hiring, evaluating, and terminating district employees. Clarification is also needed for policy issues, i.e. discipline on buses.

The South Shore District School Board noted the need to create a formal communications structure between the Chief Executive Officer and Directors of Education to encourage sharing of ideas and the development of solutions to operational and education matters. This district board would welcome stronger communications with the regional board.

Budgetary concerns include the need to legislate that cost savings in operations incurred by the regional board will benefit education programming at the district level. It is felt that with the current people working in the system, this will occur, however, it needs to be formalized.

This district board noted a preference to either contract the Southwest board for services, or create a central service body, as some services provided to the district may not be required.

Organization Meetings

The team also met with some individuals, and representatives of a number of organizations, as listed in Appendix C. The following summarizes the input received from these meetings.

The issue of accountability to the community was raised by some participants, from the perspective of the importance of local input, involvement and authority. The Southwest Regional Board is an example where accountability is to the province and the Minister, rather than to the community, for support services that affect students. Many presenters commented on the inherent interrelationship of educational matters and operational/support matters, and the importance of considering decisions with this broader perspective in mind.

Most presenters agreed that the public has little or no understanding of who makes the decisions that affect students, and noted there has been little communication to educate them. There is a sense that decisions that are made are usually well intentioned but may not always be the most suitable.

Governance issues were raised by some participants. Each district board reported that it took some time to sort out responsibilities, although things are working better now than in the beginning. Similarly, there is a lack of certainty about the relationship between school advisory councils and the boards themselves.

Difficulties with support services appear to have increased since the pilot was introduced. Support staff representatives agreed that centralization of responsibilities should have led to efficiencies, yet these have not materialized, and they feel they could demonstrate greater efficiencies if given the chance and were consulted. Funding pressures are increasing and there is concern some of these operations could be privatized; some representatives called for dedicated funding in the areas of operations including maintenance and transportation. In the transportation area, there was general consensus that the service has been deteriorating over the past 3-4 years, and that in the Tri-County area, the Southwest should bus its students rather than continue sharing the service with CSAP.

The monitoring and evaluation of educational outcomes is a responsibility of the Southwest Regional School Board, and some baseline work has been done. Those involved in this function to date agreed there is a need to take this further, and indicated there was not yet a mechanism in place to co-ordinate what has been started, with other elements such as school improvement plans or overall board planning.

Professional staff in each of the two boards varied in their views on whether communications have improved with the pilot, however, all representatives want a system that is responsive to the needs of students, and expressed a wish for more consultation. Perceptions about accessibility of board and central office staff varied depending on how close or far away the representatives lived from board offices.

Support staff within schools (secretaries, clerical) understood the concern with respect to the reporting relationship with Southwest, but the general feeling is that in practice, they take direction from their principals so is not a hindrance for them. They do feel the need to reinstate the Secretarial Supervisor position to co-ordinate their concerns, however. Other support staff (maintenance and transportation) also expressed support for making services more efficient, and would welcome an opportunity for more communications and consultation.

Finally, some presenters expressed concern at the early time frame for the evaluation, and whether data would be too limited to draw substantive conclusions. For example, these boards are still in their first full budget year with separate budgets. Some presenters felt the staff and boards need more time to develop the pilot structure, resolve governance, responsibility and control issues, and try to make it work effectively. Alternatively, some others felt the Team should consider moving to two separate regional boards. Regardless of the final outcome, however, all presenters indicated a will to make the structure work.

Appendix E

Thematic Observations from Meetings and Submissions

Introduction

This pilot structure has been in place since June 2000, or just over one school year, having been introduced in the midst of a budget year. As noted earlier, this was a new structure for Nova Scotia, and it is to be expected that some things may be found to work better than others. Having said that, the Team considered an evaluation after one year to be appropriate as a way of supporting the staff and boards in making incremental progress with this structure.

Three factors may have affected many of the comments received, and the low response rate and turnout to meetings. First, there is widespread confusion and uncertainty, particularly with the general public, about the roles and responsibilities for education services and programs, and also administration and operations which were most changed by the pilot. Second, there is a general perception from the input received that, with just over one year in operation, it is quite early to evaluate the pilot. Third, there appears to be a perception that there is not a current crisis in the education system in this area, thus no pressing need to provide input may have been felt.

Another observation, in hindsight, is that the pilot structure was proposed in the face of specific problems, without a strategic plan or structured analysis as to how this solution might help to address them, and without funds to support the transition. From the perspective of one year later, it is evident that more formal terms of reference to guide staff and board members on consultations, communications, organizational issues, professional development and educational outcomes requirements would have been helpful during the transition period.

Shown below, organized by theme, are general observations made by the team during the review.

Governance

Uncertainties exist on the part of the public and staff as to who is responsible for what services. Phone calls and questions are frequently mis-directed. There are blurred lines of responsibility in the organization structure, in that even incumbents themselves may be unsure of their roles. Gaps in the organization have led to functions slipping 'through the cracks', and in some cases micro management in an effort to overcome gaps. Governance is often confused with administration.

While duties and responsibilities in the legislation appear reasonably clear, the translation to operational reality has not been clear. A definition of responsibilities of all partners is needed, to ensure that everyone in the system knows and understands these roles and who can resolve particular issues. Many presenters commented that the system is working as well as it is due in large part to the commitment of the personalities involved. Once defined, roles and responsibilities must be extremely well communicated, so that parents and the public clearly understand who can solve problems to avoid these confusions.

The organization chart in use varies from the one envisioned by the department. In practice, there is no direct line from the Directors of Education to the CEO; but only to the Co-Ordinator of Monitoring and Evaluation. The CEO is linked only to the Directors of Finance and Administration, and Corporate Services. There is also no link to School Advisory Councils either from staff or boards, nor is there any linkage to parents, students or principals.

The responsibility for school closure decisions rests with district school boards, however, there is little or no incentive to make these decisions, because any savings arising from closure accrue to the Southwest's administrative services budget component.

The Southwest Regional School Board is misnamed, in that it is not a board as such. Some presenters suggested removing the reference to 'school board' to help clarify any confusion.

The concept of a single person having overall responsibility for both administrative and educational matters arose in several meetings. While there is general consensus against a return to the former Southwest board structure, views varied widely on alternatives, ranging from two regional school boards to various alternative approaches to delivery of the administrative services. The need for greater co-ordination and collaboration was a frequently-voiced concern.

Several presenters noted the need for a more holistic approach so as to recognize the close inter-relationship between the educational program, and services such as pupil transportation, and provision of safe and healthy facilities. The benefits of responsibility in all these areas, as with other regional school boards, and the idea of moving to two regional school boards were often stated. The concern with this approach is the questionable financial viability of two school boards, given ongoing population decline.

The school system in southwestern Nova Scotia has experienced, and will continue to experience, a greater student population decline than elsewhere in Nova Scotia. As shown in Appendix F, since 1996-97, Southwest has declined 4.4% compared to the provincial average of 3.6%. Projections to 2005 show a 10.1% decline in the Southwest, compared to a 7% projected decline in the province. This is a significant factor which must be taken into consideration in assessing the pilot structure.

The difficulty of having school secretaries employed by the regional board, although they work in schools overseen by district boards, was raised several times. The common suggestion made is that they become employees of district boards.

A presenter noted that the intention is for the administrative entity to perform monitoring and evaluation, not only for the administrative services it provided, but also for the education programs and services for students. This role is present in the organization chart, but must be strengthened.

There is a need for greater clarity in the model of school board governance used, as the model is the foundation for understanding the role of board members and the interrelationship with staff responsibilities. Some presenters stated that the Carver model has been used, while others

differed. While professional development has been presented to board members to explain their governance roles, this has not been ongoing and the differing responses received during consultations points to a need for an increased emphasis in this area.

Both district school boards report an increased ability to focus on the quality and delivery of their educational programs, although in both cases, there are instances (in some cases considerable) where committee and board time is still spent on other issues. There are a large number of ad-hoc committees, particularly in Tri-County. Both boards also appear to spend a relatively large proportion of meeting time in-camera rather than in public. This involvement in other issues is partly attributable to the blurred line between administration and governance.

Positive relationships exist within each district school board, which report working well together, and differences of opinion are accepted with support from other members. Board members in general feel the model has increased their accessibility, while public reaction was evenly mixed. The public strongly feels board members are caring and dedicated to students and their best interests.

Education Programs and Services

In general, presenters feel it is perhaps too early to comment conclusively in this area. There have been some innovations, but one school year is too short to evaluate their effectiveness.

Both district school boards, but South Shore in particular, report being able to focus much more in the pilot year on educational issues.

One linkage which appears not to have been well established in either district school board is the relationship between school advisory councils (SACs), school improvement plans and board initiatives. The Southwest takes pride in being the first in the province to have school advisory councils in every school, although some presenters felt SACs were less effective or were less involved. As was observed in the 2000 School Boundaries Task Force Report, SACs are important components of the governance structure, however, SACs may not always fill the full role envisioned in legislation, particularly the advisory linkages to school boards.

The pilot, particularly the separation of education and transportation functions, has had the effect of reducing support for student activities in the co-curricular and extra-curricular areas. Choices made in the transportation service do not always consider the impact on curricular activities.

Very long transport times were mentioned, although this issue predates the pilot. Where students have very long bus trips, they are often tired when they arrive at school, and less able to take part in community activities or their own school work at the day's end. Students from rural and remote areas can be precluded from fully participating in school life, and activities.

Both district school boards commented on partnerships with agencies. While some partnerships predated the pilot itself, there are some innovative and excellent examples of what could happen as a result of well-founded partnerships. It appeared from comments made that it may in fact be

easier to develop and test these partnerships with the smaller district school board structure, than with the Southwest board. For example, the Assistive Technology Centre in Lunenburg may not have happened if a district-wide solution had been mandated.

Finance

The two district school boards see themselves as separate, when in fact for financial purposes they remain linked as a single financial entity.

The Southwest board has accountability for, and control over, funds allocated to the Southwest region. It was stated by some presenters that it is perceived that funds for support services (for example, transportation and building maintenance) are allocated first, with distribution of the remainder to the district boards for educational delivery (staff and services). However, there may be unique needs in one or both the boards which need consideration; i.e. the perceived transfer of students from CSAP to Tri-County during the school year has funding implications.

Because boards are funded for the most part based on enrolment, and many programs have fixed costs (for example salaries, based on contracts, etc.) there is much less flexibility for boards to address unexpected issues which may arise. Based on the good relationships between the current senior staff, these issues have been resolved. There is little incentive to save money, particularly if the purpose is to assist the other district school board with an over expenditure, or to share resources. There is also no set of guidelines to address the application of operational savings in the best interests of students.

Members of district school boards are provided with financial statements regularly; however they may not possess the necessary expertise to understand some of the implications, or to know what questions to ask. Tri-County board members stated they did not have the financial understanding or input, and are not comfortable in this area. South Shore stated it is willing to continue having the administrative body deal with its finances.

With respect to responsiveness in the financial area, in general board members expressed a good level of trust and satisfaction with the CEO and Director, Finance and Administration.

Operational Services

Currently, these services are performed by a central service provider; however, many presenters expressed concerns that services did not meet students' needs, decisions about services were apparently made without taking into consideration the potential implications for students, and there was a perception that middle management positions had been expanded to the detriment of funding for the core educational programs. Some presenters feel students are not the focus of current decision-making in operational services.

As the central provider of support services, the Southwest Regional School Board continues to provide services as in the previous structure; however in many cases the day to day link with schools is one more step removed. Many presenters mentioned increased delays in getting

service, or examples of changes to policy or operating procedures by Southwest staff without consultation. Primarily, this dealt with transportation changes, and also finance and maintenance issues.

A common suggestion was that as a central provider, there is a need for greater transparency in decision-making. Consultation with district boards to determine the parameters of their needs is required, and services could be negotiated based on needs and resources. District boards could then be able to hold the provider responsible for quality of services given.

Particularly in Tri-County, but also in South Shore, there are numerous complaints about busing. Presenters stated that busing is more than just transporting students to and from school. It is an essential component of the day to day educational learning experience, as are the co-curricular and extra-curricular programs, especially in rural areas. CSAP and Tri-County boards bus each others' students based on geography, and school schedules may not be aligned, further hampering student access to school activities. Some presenters noted inefficiencies in the way routing, staff assignment and such issues are managed, and how parents and staff can make contact with dispatchers.

Uncertainties were expressed with respect to the role of, and accessibility to, services expected in human resources, particularly who is responsible for which decisions. Some presenters suggested that, as district boards are responsible for their own hiring (except secretaries), the role of Southwest's human resources service should be clarified as records-related. A new position of Director, Corporate Services was created for the pilot, and some education-related functions were assigned to this office (Community Learning, Race Relations/Cross Cultural Understanding & Human Rights, Technology Co-Ordinator, international students, summer school). District school boards commented on their sense of a loss of access to these services, and a reduced ability to address relevant issues without direct contact with these services.

Communications

While the legislation sets up an adequate framework within which a structure can be developed, in operational terms few formal lines of communication have been created. Some, although not all, of the resultant gaps have been offset to some extent due to personalities involved in key positions.

As noted elsewhere, stakeholders want and need more involvement in policy decisions, where legitimate interests overlap. Without clear communications mechanisms, this has not occurred. For example, one of the district boards introduced a policy on busing of voluntary transfer students and several presenters expressed concern at not being involved at an earlier stage in its development.

This region already has School Advisory Councils at each school, each of which should have developed its school improvement plan. However, it is not clear that these have been gathered, considered, linked with board initiatives, analyzed for feasibility or 'best practices', given approval to proceed in some fashion, or in any other way been considered 'corporately'. Similarly, the Co-Ordinator of Monitoring and Evaluation gathered information on schools and

school/district programs in 2000-01, but no action seems to have been taken to use the information by Directors of Education or district school boards, or as part of considering school improvement plans or board-initiated efforts to date.

A clearer understanding of what is meant by monitoring and evaluation is needed, and clear linkages drawn between this function, the CEO and Directors. The position responsible for this function is currently vacant, the incumbent having been seconded to the department, which does not follow the model.

The Tri-County board provided reports to the evaluation team which they voluntarily prepared for the department during the transition to the pilot structure. This demonstrated their wish for open communications with the department at that time. It is also noted this board has a newsletter, "Tri Notes", for parents and staff, which appears easy to read, timely and quite comprehensive.

Accountability

A key area of accountability for the educational program is the measurement, monitoring and reporting of educational outcomes. This is not being fulfilled to the extent it could be as anticipated under the Act. While there are elements of monitoring being conducted (school improvement plans, the 2000-01 school inventory) they are not considered in the broader context of how the system is working, and in areas where results indicate that improvements are required. Without this context, any initiatives that are undertaken could miss the real targets and/or not represent best value for money and effort expended.

Most senior staff expressed uncertainty as to what was expected of them by the pilot structure. Board members, similarly, have struggled with their proper role. These uncertainties hamper the ability of boards and staff to fulfil their role to deliver the education program, to be effective and accountable, and to adequately communicate with government.

Following the 1996 amalgamation, the Southwest Regional School Board retained two offices (Yarmouth and Bridgewater), which was seen by some as a physical representation of other dysfunctions. Some presenters expressed lack of certainty surrounding roles, and there are also concerns related to lack of trust or awareness, that may exist largely because of the continued existence of the two offices.

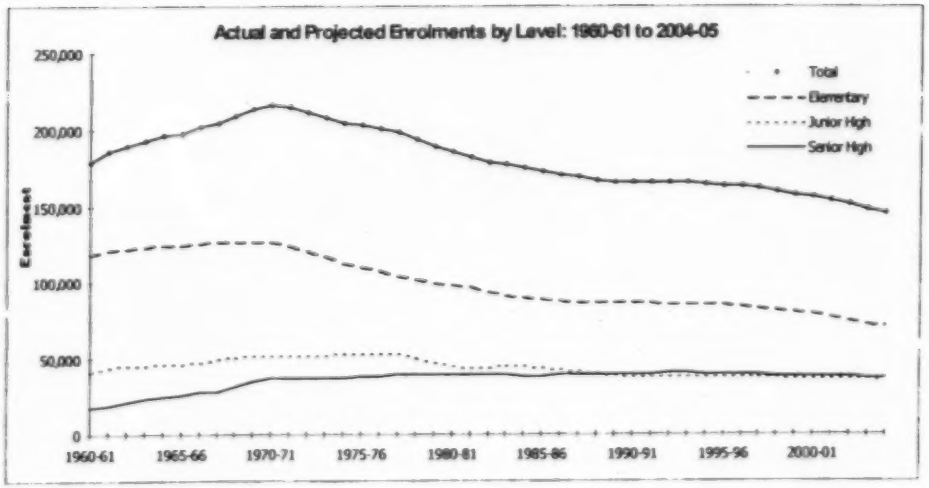
When the pilot structure was implemented, the Department of Education did develop a model organization structure and provided information on how it saw the monitoring and evaluation function operating. More follow through would have been helpful to actually establish the role.

Appendix F

Historical and Projected Student Enrolments

Board	Actual Enrolments 1985-86	1990-91	1995-96
Annapolis	4,219	4,054	3,902
Antigonish	4,783	4,529	4,368
Cape Breton	20,768	19,090	17,967
Clare-Argyle	3,344	3,084	2,908
Colchester-E Hants	13,210	13,168	12,889
Cumberland	6,641	6,104	5,928
Dartmouth	11,443	11,020	10,680
Digby	2,477	2,068	1,913
Guysborough	2,740	2,455	2,165
Halifax	15,430	14,266	14,336
Halifax Co-Bedford	28,186	30,123	32,770
Hants West	3,714	3,489	3,401
Inverness	5,070	4,559	4,199
Kings	11,405	11,157	11,293
Lunenburg	8,537	8,283	8,183
Northside-Victoria	7,596	6,983	6,426
Pictou	10,831	10,311	9,369
Queens	2,648	2,284	2,019
Richmond	2,855	2,358	2,053
Shelburne	3,390	3,014	3,005
Yarmouth	3,337	3,340	3,445
Grand Havre			811
Total	**172,614**	**165,739**	**164,020**

Board	Actual Enrolments 1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	Projected Enrolments 2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Cape Breton-Victoria	24,024	23,394	22,411	21,829	*21,259*	*20,617*	*19,965*	*19,315*	*18,685*
Strait	11,476	11,156	10,758	10,427	*10,116*	*9,826*	*9,447*	*9,137*	*8,781*
Chignecto-Central	28,140	27,716	27,275	26,966	*26,585*	*26,170*	*25,792*	*25,420*	*25,036*
Halifax	58,219	58,348	58,297	58,175	*58,030*	*57,600*	*57,197*	*56,669*	*56,008*
Annapolis Valley	18,511	18,458	18,219	18,039	*17,849*	*17,687*	*17,350*	*17,121*	*16,824*
Southwest	19,418	19,105	18,797	18,598	*18,240*	*17,816*	*17,402*	*16,937*	*16,564*
Acadien provincial	4,153	4,182	4,254	4,171	*4,221*	*4,210*	*4,203*	*4,200*	*4,178*
Total	**163,941**	**162,359**	**160,011**	**158,205**	***156,300***	***153,926***	***151,356***	***148,799***	***146,076***



Note:

(1) This table reflects the amalgamation of school boards and the creation of the Acadien provincial between the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school year.

Source: *Statistical Summary 1999-2000*. Nova Scotia Department of Education, Research and Statistics, p. 7.

Appendix G

Recommended Legislative Changes

This is a list of amendments to the *Education Act* as identified by the Evaluation Team. It is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is assumed that legal advice would be sought as necessary.

1. Moving functions from Regional, to District School Board, jurisdiction:
   - Secretaries in schools and district school board offices
   - Summer school (for P-12)
   - International students
   - Race Relations, Cross Cultural Understanding and Human Rights (RCH)
   - Adult high school for students up to age 21
   - Technology technicians (except those required by the Southwest Education Authority)

2. Establish the board Advisory Committee, and establish a direct linkage between the district school boards and School Advisory Councils

3. Nominal changes:
   - Change Chief Executive Officer to Chief Educational Officer, and note preference that the individual be an educator with appropriate training and significant administration experience
   - Change name of Southwest Regional School Board to Southwest Education Authority (hereinafter called the "Authority".)

4. Continue the appointment of the Chief Educational Officer as a Ministerial appointment, based on a competition process as provided in the Civil Service Act, with input of the board Advisory Committee, and recommendation to the Minister. Term of appointment to be five years, renewable, after 2004. Provide for five year terms of appointment for Directors of Education, renewable, after 2004.

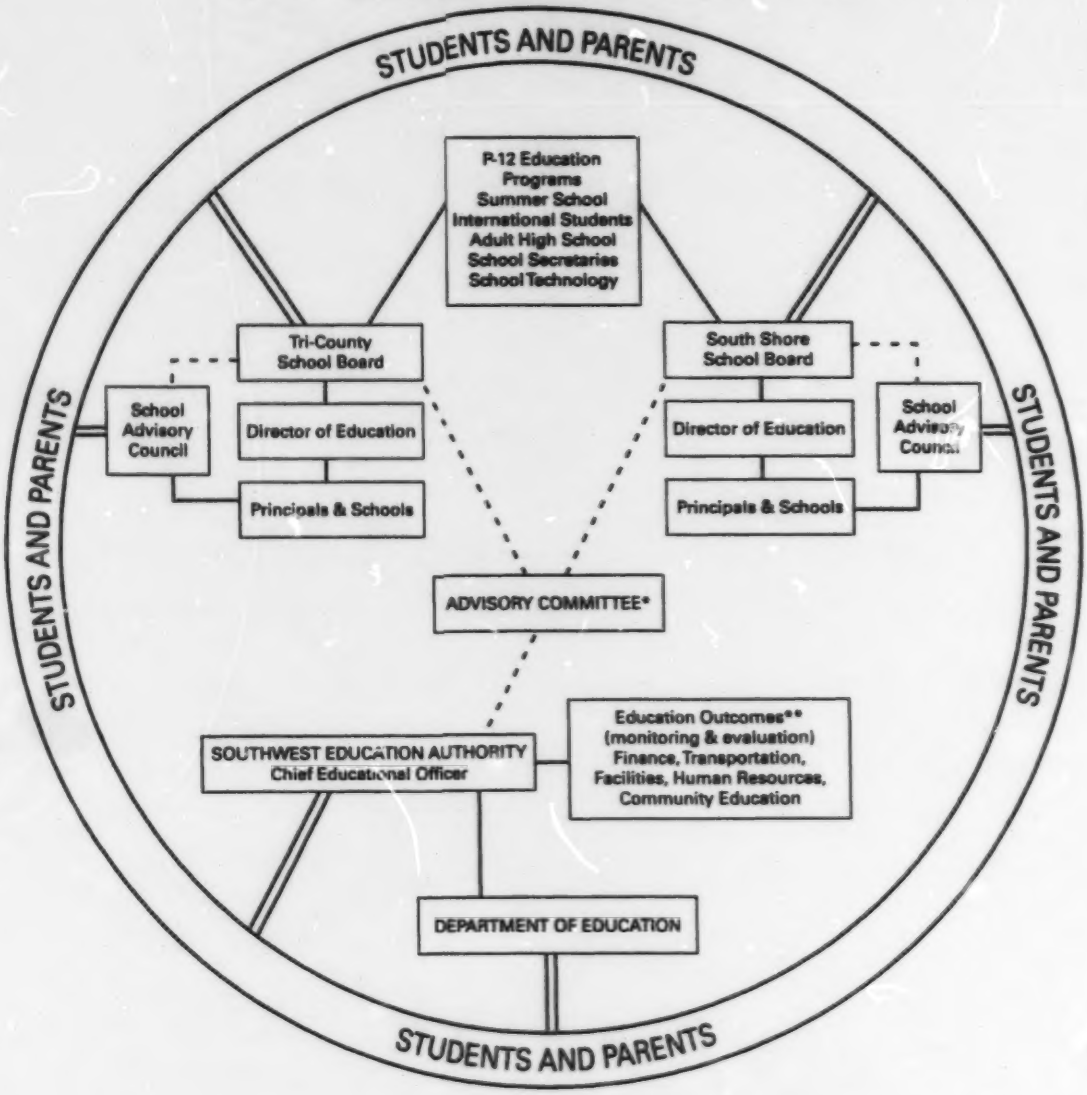
5. Revise the list of duties and responsibilities of the Chief Educational Officer to reflect those of Superintendents where appropriate, and to place the educational elements first to reflect the importance of these duties. Ensure the list of duties and responsibilities of the Director of Education also are organized to reflect the importance of educational duties.

6. If the sunset clause is removed, and title of the Southwest Regional School Board is changed, take care with Section 10 [A][5] - a provision in the event district school boards are discontinued - if that Section is not also deleted.

7. Amend provisions with regard to school closures (10B[1][j] and 10F [3][c]) so the responsibility is shared (decision belongs to district school board, and Authority provides financial and resource support) with net savings being shared in the best interests of students.

Appendix H

Proposed Organization Chart for School Board Structure in the Former Southwest Regional School Board Area



The circle representing students and parents is intended to reflect the focus of each of the educational organizations shown, in fulfillment of Recommendations 1 and 5.

** Advisory Committee consists of each Board Chair and one member from each board and CEO. This committee must meet at least 10 times per year.*
*** This position works with program staff in the districts to ensure quality education outcomes.*